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ABSTRACT

Site-based management (SBM) gives teachers, principals, and communities a method for directly affecting and improving their schools. This newsletter describes some of the advantages of SBM, which can result in greater accountability for student learning and an increased opportunity for parents, teachers, students, and business. The greatest pitfall is the amount of time needed for successful implementation, which usually takes 5 to 10 years. A second challenge is the redefinition of roles, particularly that of the school administrator. Mandated by the Texas legislature in 1990, SBM has become a legal requirement for Texas administrators. The newsletter examines three San Antonio, Texas, schools after the first year of mandated reform. Administrators at each school believed in the positive potential of SBM. Time limits were an issue in two schools; the budget was the defining issue in the third school. (LMI)

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Site-Based Management In Secondary Schools

Discussions of school-related topics often end with the phrase, "But it's different in the business world." Well, it is and it isn't. Education has mimicked business for years in efforts to improve. As business reforms itself in the face of a changing world, education follows suit. Seeing business shed its pyramid style of management in favor of shared decision making, education now seeks to transform itself into a "new and improved" version through the idea of site-based management. The education pendulum begins another swing across the chasm of change.

Site-based management has become one means to reform our embattled schools. Lange (1993) defines the process as a tool that allows those closest to a problem to have input into its solution. It is characterized by terms such as empowerment, governance, and ownership. Most important, it demands improvement in student progress. Site-based management gives teachers, principals, and communities a method to directly affect and improve their schools.

THE BENEFITS

Although research doesn't confirm that site-based management is the panacea for reform in our schools, there are many attractive features inherent in its use.

- It recognizes that all schools are unique entities that demand individual consideration for their needs.
- Each site determines needs and solutions to its problems.
- It allows schools to evaluate their effectiveness in relation to their populations as opposed to district or state norms (Lange, 1993).

These features result in greater accountability for student learning, and this accountability fosters confidence to expand the scope of decisions that affect educational activity. In addition, Herman (1989) notes an increased opportunity for involvement in education by parents, teachers, students, and business.

Site-based management can bring about positive changes in attitude. Lange (1993) lists several effects that include commitment, confidence, cohesiveness, trust, professionalism, and respect. Hoyle (1992) cites positive attributes that include improved job satisfaction, cooperation, and well-being. The result is a positive difference for all involved.

THE PITFALLS

In spite of these benefits, some have found difficulty in letting go of traditional ways of managing and working. Central to their reluctance to embrace site-based management are time requirements and role redefinition. Change in the framework of operation is, however, inherent in the adoption of this method of management.

A process more than a product, site-based management requires 5–10 years to fully implement (Hoyle, 1992). Time, a persistent adversary in the process, requires patience and the ability to tolerate frustration. Overwhelmed by the usual demands of their jobs, teachers are a key factor in a decision-making process that requires close attention. When not compensated for the extra demands of time and energy, teachers can perceive the process as irrelevant to their personal needs and questionable as an answer to their problems. Time is also critical to the issue of bias. Lange (1993) notes the importance of planning meetings to accommodate the schedules of all representatives. He states that inclusion in each meeting becomes vital in maintaining a system that is fair to all participants. Time, again, is a factor in successful implementation.

Involvement of administrators, teachers, students, and parents requires a redefinition of roles within the system.

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Lange (1993) sees this redefinition as a shift in accountability; others view it as a threat to the central administrative staff. Leaving the comfort zone of traditional roles to venture into the unfamiliar territory of shared management can be marked by frustration and friction with those in traditional authoritative roles. Full commitment by all members of the district is needed to avoid barriers to decision making. This includes an obligation to expand and redefine the roles of all involved.

The role of the school administrator is the focal point of role redefinition. Doggett (1990) defines site-based management as decision making under "leadership, not administration." The secondary principal is challenged to be a leader instead of a manager. As a leader, the principal facilitates decision making without making the decisions, and participates in leadership by relinquishing authority to this adopted management structure.

Site-based management gives teachers, principals, and communities a method to directly affect and improve their schools.

Endangered by inadequate implementation, hidden agendas, and power struggles, the transition to site-based management requires careful consideration. Hoyle (1992) denotes "10 commandments" for the school administrator transitioning to site-based management. He enumerates the need for skill, time, modeling, persuasion, visibility, vision, and principle among the characteristics necessary to the administrator's survival. Other measures found in the literature encourage the administrator to create unity, delegate, praise efforts, set high expectations, be impartial, and protect the credibility of the process. Lange (1993) suggests that an administrator's strengths are enhanced through the cooperative efforts of a competent management team; weaknesses are minimized by the strength of that team. The campus administrator could be more successful, therefore, by relinquishing total authority. Site-based management offers the administrator positive options in trade for this authority.

THE REALITY

Site-based management is characterized by local decision making, but the scope of the decisions defines site-based management in each school—from plans that pay lip service to those that provide school councils to determine all local issues. The most influential factors governing this range are the degree of commitment to relinquishing central control and the degree of budgetary control given to the decisionmakers. Decisions made locally that do not enjoy budgetary consideration at the local level are likely to be ineffective. Those in control of such decisions are those the decisions affect, are those who determined there were problems and sought solutions, and are those with the vantage point of "being there." Without budgetary control at the local level, the impact of such decisions can be diluted, if not drowned.

The struggle for control is the most likely source of frustration during the transition and is best addressed in the planning stages. School councils can hold advisory status or shift to a legislative role. Aronstein, Marlow, and Desilets (1990) describe a council that has elected members who collect agenda items, study problems, generate solutions, and present proposals to the faculty for solution. Faculty meetings are used to present proposals, discuss issues, modify issues if necessary, and vote on them. Committees run by these elected members often involve faculty members who serve as sounding boards before a vote. Using the central administrative staff as a resource, the circle of competence is expanded beyond the council's knowledge base. Other councils serve as advisers to the administrator in annual planning, developing goals, and evaluating methods to assess success. How the management team operates and the parameters of its jurisdiction are critical issues that can draw lines of battle well before any war starts. A war may be avoided, however, if participants can agree to the parameters at the outset.

There have been suggestions for making the transition to site-based management less painful. Lange (1993) suggests that the staff understand how the school operates before implementing site-based management. Lange also supports the development of policies, definitions, and regulations at the district level prior to implementation. Training of all staff and opportunities to see the process in action will promote a positive acceptance by the central administrative staff. Hoyle (1992) promotes the notion of relevance to teachers and operation within the realm of teacher expertise to improve acceptance. As in all matters of change, there will be success when those asked to change are informed, involved, and committed.

Mandated by the Texas legislature in 1990, site-based management has become a legal requirement for Texas administrators. For some the transition has been painless since it formalized their ideal of management. Others have found the experience painful and unpromising as a cure for the ills of education. Below is an examination of three Texas schools after the first year of mandated reform.

SITE ONE

Site One is an urban high school in north central San Antonio. It is the only high school in what is considered one of the state's wealthiest districts, and has an enrollment of 1,135. Its population is predominantly white and Hispanic, 11 percent are considered economically disadvantaged, 99 percent graduate, and 23 percent are considered college prepared.

Following the mandate to employ site-based management, the district provided an implementation plan that coordinated elements of the process, defined terms, and set up a schedule. In complying with the district's plan, the school formed a site-based committee consisting of the administrator (who served as chairman), any faculty member who wished to serve, and a contingent of parents selected from those who volunteered. The committee met every other week to discuss attendance, learning styles, indicators of academic excellence, and other suggestions from the membership. In its inaugural year, the site-based management committee produced requests for two waivers that affected student progress.

The administration considers the process a success, but acknowledges that it is very time-consuming. Positive results

include a participatory model of decision making and advocacy for teachers and students, and a parent-teacher forum for discussion. The only negative factor has been the great demand of time from the staff and the community. The school population has, however, appreciated its ownership in the decision-making process.

Committed to the success of this plan, the central administrative staff has supported the issues raised by this committee. Its initial plan provided for a division of labor to anticipate conflicts of interest, but budgetary considerations may yet create opportunity for discord as the process evolves.

The administration sees the process as changing and improving over time, and time has become an ally in this aspect of the implementation. Open communication is considered a key factor in the plan's successful implementation. The opportunity for a safe environment to communicate ideas has been recognized as another positive result of employing site-based management.

It is recognized at this site that the process is a formal way of accomplishing that for which they have always strived. The community is pleased with its participation at the local level. Accountability still rests, however, with the administrator. The administration sees the process as valid and the likelihood of resistance to new ideas as low as long as change is brought about in a careful and informed manner. Implementing site-based management is a relatively painless experience at this site and has had a positive effect on the school.

Site-based management ... will forever change the concept of school management.

SITE TWO

This high school in northwest San Antonio is one of five high schools in a sprawling district. Its enrollment of 2,370 is predominantly white and Hispanic. Sixteen percent of the population are considered economically disadvantaged. Its teachers are highly experienced—50 percent have at least 10 years of experience—and it targets nearly one-quarter of its budget for special programs to meet individual student needs.

In keeping with the legislature's demands, the school district developed a plan for implementing site-based management. The resulting board policy defined the parameters under which the school site operates within the context of site-based management. This school, like all others in the district, has a school advocacy team chaired by the principal with members elected from each department, parents, and participants from the community. The district has defined the domains over which the school can exert its influence. Campus domains overlap with district domains in some instances, and it is in this collaborative area that the district will have to decide how deep its commitment to site-based management actually is. There is a verbal commitment to accommodate decisions with budgetary considerations, which require approval based on documented research and proven value. This area will provide another opportunity to display commitment to its plan.

The administration supports this method of management as a useful tool, but feels that there has not been sufficient time for the tool to prove its worth (there has been a need to focus on such issues as orientation and policy). The full value of the process is yet to be realized. It is also felt that district workshops on group dynamics, consensus building, and decision making foster an environment that greatly benefits students. Site-based management seems to hold promise as a useful management tool in this situation.

Positive results so far include improved performance due to a vested interest in the process. Ownership in determining what quality means in this school and how it should be attained has resulted in an evident commitment to accomplish all goals. The process has generated considerable interest.

The most serious problem so far has been time. After-school meetings accommodate as many members as possible, but coordinating the schedules of all involved is a monumental task. Within the time limits only a few issues can be addressed without feelings of being overwhelmed. Time limits the scope of what can be reasonably addressed.

Transition from a traditional management style is not complete. Site-based management is emerging slowly and the administrator's role is still changing; the administrator is now called upon to be a facilitator. In an advisory capacity, the administration is obligated to see that the process works according to district guidelines. As in traditional management, accountability rests solely with the administrator.

The administration believes that site-based management is here to stay and that it will evolve on each campus over time. It will be incumbent on those involved to determine how far the scope of its decision making will reach.

SITE THREE

This middle school in north central San Antonio is one of nine middle schools in a district that serves more than 42,000 students. This campus serves 1,126 students in grades 6 through 8. The population is predominantly white and Hispanic, 4 percent of whom are considered economically disadvantaged. The staff is highly experienced—64 percent have more than 10 years of experience.

Site-based management was introduced in this district prior to the state-mandated guidelines. A full year prior to the 1992 required implemetation, this district boasted a plan defining terms, organizing timelines, and incorporating budget considerations. Unlike most other districts, the focal point of change was the budget. Most changes in decision making were driven by the new budget process.

In response to this program, this campus elected representatives to serve on a variety of committees that address local issues—a campus plan committee, a site-based committee, a behavior management committee, a budget committee, and others. Each committee addresses issues in its realm, considers budgetary impact, and proposes solutions and plans of action to the faculty. The faculty votes on the proposals and the principal and budget committees seek ways to fund them. The process was preceded by explanation and training by the central administrative staff. The administration sees good com-

munication, ample inservice, detailed explanations, and a cohesive faculty as primary factors in the plan's success.

The transition to site-based management has been a positive experience on this campus, and the staff has responded well to controlling their destiny. Common planning periods have lessened the impact of time problems, although it has not eliminated them. The central administration developed a plan that relinquished all budgetary control, except for employee benefits, to the local campus, and local scrutiny over how these funds are used has resulted in fewer frivolous expenditures. It has been difficult to set priorities among needs for budget consideration without sacrificing the process that brought them to light, but a justification process has aided the budget committee in this area. Ownership in the decision-making process has resulted in a more productive climate.

Guided by the mandates of the legislature, all schools are simply expected to comply; how they comply is left to each campus. This stance offers less opportunity for conflict over control issues. The community has responded to this management change positively; the administration reports that the community is amazed that the school staff can manage their extra responsibilities in their day-to-day environment.

The administration views this method of management as an effective way to address the variety of needs on the various campuses. In accepting this premise, the administrator's role has changed to that of a budget manager in this version of site-based management. This role entails functioning in an unfamiliar domain, and transition from the traditional method is more difficult due to less expertise in this area. Even in this version of site-based management, responsibility ultimately rests with the administrator. The administration is aware that this process is evidence of accountability for spending public money. The administration is certain that the process is here to stay and expects that demands for expanded participation will be mandated soon.

CONCLUSION

Site-based management may not be the panacea for education reform, but it will forever change the concept of school management. Even its most watered-down version opens the door of involvement to those who were once governed from the top. It has forced the collaboration of all factions in the school community and it has demanded shared ownership for the decisions affecting our schools.

While compliance is sometimes labored, the full implication of this mandate remains to be seen. Site-based management is, however, creating quite a stir.

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NASSP has established the National Alliance of High Schools to provide services to high school–based leadership teams. For more information contact NASSP Membership at:
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